# Farmers engagement during diagnostic (system understanding) activities

Africa RISING project in Ethiopia devotes the first year of its project period for understanding the farming system and communities by undertaking participatory assessments of the bio-physical and socio-economic issues in the crop-livestock-tree farming systems of its research sites. It was critical to do so for project like Africa RISING that focus on sustainable intensification by taking in to account the whole system of the farming system and the farmers. The main purpose of assessing and characterize the farming systems and communities is to bring farmers to the centre of the project research to play a role of telling their story, their farm and the system they are operating their day to day business including the markets, services, policy and institutions. These helped the project to identify key research thematic areas which was translated in to a number of demand driven and integrated action research protocols through networks of interlinked innovation platforms. Although there are different approaches that can be used for understanding the key issues that hinder sustainable intensification, the project prefers to use the following participatory assessment tools to engage men and women farmers and local stakeholders for system understanding:

* [Rapid telephone surveys](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41927/AR_Brief7.pdf?sequence=4)
* [Sustainable Livelihood Asset Evaluation (SLATE)](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41930/AR_Brief5.pdf?sequence=3)
* [Rapid market assessment](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41929/AR_Brief4.pdf?sequence=4)
* [Participatory community assessmen](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41926/AR_Brief6.pdf?sequence=4)t (PCA)
* [Participatory community analysis](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41926/AR_Brief6.pdf?sequence=4)
* [Agro-ecological knowledge toolkit](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41928/AR_Brief8.pdf?sequence=4)

The following methods were employed in all the research sites to approach and engage farmers:

* Focus group discussion with different groups of farmers (men, women and youth)
* Household survey for different diagnostic agendas that represent the population of the research sites (wealth groups, age, sex, leadership, geographic locations)
* On farm interview, nursery survey, telephone survey, feed calendar,

The number of local partners from research centre, university, government departments and NGOs) who have been established per research sites and centrally trained to elicit and analyze local knowledge of farmers to help the project team to identify thematic research areas for interventions. From the above listed participatory toolkits the number of local partners engaged in data collection during the [PCA](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41926/AR_Brief6.pdf?sequence=4) and [SLATE](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/41930/AR_Brief5.pdf?sequence=3) only reached 60 from all of the four project sites and they have engaged a total number of 900 farmers engaged. The trained partners from the research sites have been the one who collected information form the farmer and analyzed to characterize the farming system and communities. They have been members of the innovation platform networks established at woreda. Kebele and community level and play a key role in implementing the designed integrated interventions, demonstration and communicating of the findings. Most of the 900 farmers engaged in the two assessments and other number of farmers engaged in the rest four participatory assessment approaches have gained a fare understanding of the project purpose and objectives. They now own the project and provided enormous information without hesitation that helped the project to have a better understanding of the smallholder farmers’, their values and problems they experienced and able to characterize the farming systems which was translated to integrated system research interventions to address the problems and capitalize on the potential identified. It also helped the project to establish a network of interlinked innovation platforms at different level that was found a space facilitated for iterative learning and sharing for scaling up in a regular basis.

# The principles, guidelines and standards that we follow while engaging farmers in our project activities

There are a number of values Africa RISING is applying while engaging farmers and these can be summarized as follows:

* **Confidentiality**: those farmers who have been engaged in providing information have been informed about the project purpose and told that all information they provided is confidential
* **Trust building**: creating trust by farmers on the project is a must to create ownership-this is being achieved through respecting and engaging all groups of representatives of farmers in the whole project phases
* **Respecting views and opinions**: value farmers views and opinions while engaging on research, workshop and trainings
* **Value indigenous knowledge**: farmers have a good reason on making their own decision in their livelihoods
* **Inclusive**: the project engages all groups of farmers (men, women, youth, wealth, influential, discriminated, poor and landless) during diagnosis and target most of them based on priorities
* **Building their local capacity to innovate**: all participating farmers are grouped based on commodity as an innovation cluster/farmers research groups for strengthening their collaboration and information sharing in each research
  + From each research groups or innovation clusters representatives are selected for kebele level operational level and woreda level strategic IPs for creating two ways of information sharing and create iterative learning that is designed per one crop season or every year

Engagement during implantation and M&E

After intervention farmers were identified through such participatory and interactive process, researchers went to research implementation phase. A mechanism was set up such that the very young innovation platforms, which have farmers as members, would start contributing on research implementation.

* The different research protocols are introduced to the IP members. Technical and resource related issues are discussed thoroughly before protocols are endorsed (this could go as far as totally changing research agenda!)
* After research proposals got the green light, a visit to intervention farmers is made to make sure if experimental plots/field are in accordance with the criteria (Biophysical, socio-economic) set for the implementation of each protocol (This could be related with land size, labor, access to water, soil type, slop etc.)
* A team of researchers, IP TG members, site coordinators and intervention farmers participate in this plot/site validation work.

During all this process we make sure that farmers’ perspective contributes in making the design and implementation of the interventions demand driven. Meaning, we try to make sure that;

* The process is participatory enough and is open to dialogue and negotiation
* There is a shared understanding on research objectives
* Incentives are well aligned
* Power relations among different actors are well managed and brokered

Monitoring and Evaluation

Apart from the program level monitoring and evaluation framework that is done by IFPRI, ILRI has set up its own [M&E framework](https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/59772/AR_Ethiopia_IPmoneval_2015.pdf?sequence=1) when it comes to farmers’ and other actors’ engagement in the research activities. By drawing a lesson from previous ILRI Research-for-Development projects, we are monitoring and evaluation actors’ engagement process using a number of M&E tools that were developed using the KIDS (Keep it descriptive and simple!) approach. Through this framework farmers and local actors are involved in;

* Developing a quarterly action plan for the IP TG members
* Monitor activities outlined on the action plan on IP meetings
* Field visit, data collection and compilation on biophysical interventions
* Assign M&E personnel that champions the M&E work and collect data on jointly identified indicators (change in actor linkages; actor representation, capacity development; IP contribution to research and process facilitation)
* Identification, record and selection of MSC (Most Significant Change) stories emerging from AR interventions

Engagement process diagram

**Kebele**

**Sub-kebele**

**Village**

**Farmer Group**

**Individual household**

**Research institutions**

**CGIAR**

**National**

IP representative farmers Consultation and Involvement

Kebele IP meetings

Woreda strategic IP meetings

**Farmers in different**

**levels of IPs**

**Farmers’ and actors involvement in Africa RISING**

**Woreda IPs**

**Kebele IPs**

Time

Adopted from-Jim Ellis Johns (2014)